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24 August 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

SUBJECT: Post Mortems on NIE's

1. The Office of National Estimates was organized and began to produce NIE's in November 1950. During the year that followed we concentrated on organizing a good staff, developing workable procedures, building up goodwill among our co-workers in the intelligence community, improving the quality of our estimates, and developing relations with our principal consumer — the NSC — in order to get maximal guidance on what to produce.

2. These problems continue to be the important ones. By July 1951, ONE concluded that one way to improve the quality of future estimates was to spend time in identifying the most serious intelligence gaps during and after the production of an estimate and to try to get something done about them. This effort has generally been referred to as the conduct of Post Mortems.

3. Our first attempt to do this formally was with NIE-32, "Effects of Operations in Korea on the Internal Situation in Communist China", dated 10 July 1951. (See IAC-D-25, dated 2 July 1951.) By fall of 1951 we began agitating for some regular procedure for such review. Our next specific attempt was with NIE-55, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action", dated 7 December 1951. This estimate was chosen to serve as a focal point for discussing the procedural aspects of our problem with the IAC agencies. As a result of a meeting of the IAC representatives on 13 February, it was agreed that a post mortem of NIE-35/1, "Probable Developments in Indochina Through Mid-1952", dated 3 March 1952, would be undertaken on an experimental basis.

4. This attempt was unsuccessful largely because of differing viewpoints — not of what gaps existed, but of what steps to take. Was or was not formal IAC action called for? The discussion led eventually to a clarification of views and to the adoption of a procedure. (See ONE Memo to IAC dated 3 June 1952. Refer also to Para. 2, IAC-44-71.)

5. During FY 1952, seven (7) estimates were post mortemed; during FY 1953, eleven (11). For FY 1952 this represents 14% of the total number of estimates produced; for FY 1953, 23%.

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6. The most dramatic effect of the conduct of these post mortems has been in the case of SE-27. In short, our findings and recommendations resulted in a major reallocation of research effort on Communist China. ORR has now built up a considerable capability for producing contributions on economic trends in Communist China.

7. By early 1953, it became apparent that reviewing each estimate after its production was not the best way to consolidate gaps for the purpose of getting optimum response from research and collection activities. This was illustrated when we found it necessary to combine the post mortems of three estimates on the Far East (NIE-47, NIE-55/1, and NIE-58). Even this exercise overlapped to some extent what had been done previously on another Far East estimate (SE-27).

8. We are therefore taking a new look. Currently ORR has been told by the IAC to come up with a revision of DCID 4/2: Priority List of Critical National Intelligence Objectives. (This DCID is based on NSCID-4: National Intelligence Objectives.) Our tentative conclusion is that post mortems in the future will take this form: statements of gaps, on an area or functional basis, identified largely as a result of having produced estimates on these areas or topics, and placed within the guide-lines of DCID-4/2.

National Estimates

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List of Estimates on Which Some  
Post Mortem Action Has Been Taken

Special Estimates

SE-27  
SE-29  
SE-34

National Intelligence Estimates

NIE-21/1  
NIE-25  
NIE-29/2  
NIE-32  
NIE-35/1  
NIE-35/2  
NIE-42/1  
NIE-47  
NIE-52  
NIE-55  
NIE-55/1  
NIE-58  
NIE-60  
NIE-70  
NIE-75/1

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